

The Army Lessons Process

Supporting Individual and Organisational Learning in the Australian Army

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“The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is to get an old idea out”

Basil Liddell Hart

ABSTRACT

The paper focuses upon four distinct foci. Firstly, we examine the whole of Army responsibility in relation to the transfer of knowledge into lessons. Secondly, we consider the vital roles and responsibilities of knowledge authorities in this transfer. Thirdly, we examine the ways in which observations and insights transform into findings and lessons. Finally, we propose the establishment of the Army Lessons Network as a formal means of knowledge interaction.

Introduction

and capability development experiences, learning the right lessons from these experiences and applying them in current and future operations is essential for Army to succeed in the complex warfighting environment. Army must learn from its experiences and those of our friends and allies.

systematic approach for determining which lessons from ‘The War’ should be incorporated into preparations for ‘A War’ and ‘Future War’. These challenges are to be met by institutionalising an Army Lessons Process, which formalises Army responsibilities for lessons collection, analysis, decision and implementation, and establishes a lessons network to enable knowledge sharing. The lessons process accommodates inputs from multiple sources, both external and internal to Army including

lessons, particularly Land tactical lessons, from the full range of Army activities including operations. The Army lessons process operates within the context of ADF Joint, whole-of-government and coalition operations, and is aligned with the Australian Defence Organisation (ADO) lessons learned process.

Army Lessons Framework

insights. Five people who witness an event are, in all likelihood, going to recall it somewhat differently. However, with some commonality of definitions and language, the effect of subjectivity can be minimised. There are four tiers within this framework that require definitions: observation, insight, lesson, and lesson learnt.

observations need to contain sufficient elements of context to allow correct interpretation and understanding.

Observations are subjective in nature, and provide unique insights into human experience.

observations. Insights link observations by key themes of importance to Army operations, training and capability development.

authority as a means of minimising the subjective nature of observations and provide data credibility. Unfortunately, the term 'lesson' is frequently misused when referring to what is essentially an observation. This has the potential to over-inflate the significance placed on an observation and reduce verification activities.

implemented and an observed, sustainable behaviour results. This is the final stage in the process and is difficult to achieve without a whole-of-Army approach.

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importantly) believe that there is benefit from their collection and subsequent reuse.

Personal lessons are often the most valuable, as their conditions for reuse – and potential impact – are the most easily understood by the individual who recorded them.¹ The Army lessons process consists of four stages: collect, analyse, decide and implement, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Army Lessons Process

These four stages align with the ADO
Lessons Process and will be described further
throughout this paper.

lessons learned process occurring in operations^{2 3 4 5 6}, as well as during training.⁷

⁸ This culture must be supported by a culture of knowledge sharing (lessons push) to ensure that lessons are learned and institutionalised. Furthermore, lessons from operations, ‘The War’, must be analysed to determine applicability to ‘A War’ and ‘Future War’. As a principle, all Army individuals and organisations have a responsibility to collect and share observations and lessons for analysis and

learning was primarily done before and after the war. Now, however, we must learn and disseminate lessons in real-time to the fighting forces. It has been suggested that the unrelenting and inevitable turnover of personnel within Army has the potential to adversely affect Army as an organisation.⁹ However, ensuring that the lessons learned process is embedded within Army culture, down to the soldier level, will enable the organisation to retain learning.

lessons process. An observation or lesson that is collected needs to be analysed by an appropriate authority to determine its applicability and to implement any necessary action. This will ensure that lessons are collected, acted upon and learned.

Knowledge Authorities

preparing individuals and forces for operations and providing support to operations. Training users includes functional commands and organisations involved in individual and collective training. Capability development users include Headquarters and staff of organisations that contribute to the development of Army capability through the Army Continuous Modernisation Process (ACMP).

organisations for additional support, analysis and subject matter expertise. The Medium Learning Loop (MLL) is less immediate and supports Army preparations for 'A War'. These preparations are underpinned by lessons from operations, which are analysed and incorporated into doctrine and both individual and collective training, when applicable. The Long Learning Loop (LLL) is more deliberate and supports concept-led capability-based modernisation and Army preparations for 'Future War' These

delegated authorities with responsibilities for doctrine, training and capability development. The authorities play an active role in the lessons process and they are responsible for specifying lessons collection requirements, analysing lessons and implementing action to ensure lessons are learned.

Lessons Collection

organisation. Informal collection is a product of a learning culture, in which individuals are committed to collecting lessons and sharing experiences for organisational benefit. It has been suggested that such commitment varies throughout the Australian Army and is not necessarily culturally ingrained, particularly when operational tempo and organisational impediments reduce the opportunities to think and write.¹⁰ Certainly CAL is rarely overburdened by the volume of observations and

Deliberate Collection

facilitated by the Army lessons network. Deliberate collection is managed by LWDC through coordination of the network and lessons collection in accordance with the proposed Army Lessons Collection Plan.

Collection Plan aligns collection with Army priorities for operations, training and capability development. All Army commands contribute to lessons collection by specifying collection requirements, contributing to Army Lessons Collection Teams when required and collecting against the Army Lessons Collection Plan on a continuous basis.

cooperation with Army Headquarters. Army also contributes to Joint Evaluation Team and Operations Analysis Team deployments when appropriate and the results from lessons collection activities are provided to CAL for processing within Army.

the conduct of Army lessons seminars, the debriefing of individual following deployment and the capture of lessons in routine and post activity reporting.

Informal Collection

individuals to submit observations for analysis, contribute to professional debate, and participate in on-line forums such as Communities of Practice (CoP). CoP are groups of people connected by common interest and practice around a common theme and are both a means to collect insights and a means of implementing improvements.

Other Considerations

exchange of relevant lessons. Army also maintains close links with lessons organisations of other Armies in order to share information and lessons. Australian Standardisation Representatives with the American, British, Canadian and Australian Armies Program contribute to the exchange of lessons.

Lessons Integration

been analysed to determine its validity and the action necessary to change behaviour. Analysis is conducted by staff of the various authorities depending on the nature of the observation and its applicability.

analyse observations to determine the need for immediate changes to SOP or TTP and for applicability across Areas of Operation. Staff on operations reach back for analysis support from Army and other organisations if the necessary expertise is not available in-theatre.

they are enduring and whether they are applicable to 'The war' or 'Future War'. CAL forwards observations and insights to Army authorities for detailed validation, analysis and implementation.

lessons into doctrine, training and capability development. It exploits its formal links with Doctrine Sponsors and Training Advisers for this purpose. CAL is the clearing house for Army observations, insights and lessons analysis, and coordinates lessons processing by providing the lessons repository and information system to support Army lessons collection, analysis, decision and implementation.

Army Lessons Network

training and capability development to relevant authorities for analysis and action. The network is to facilitate lessons push from LWDC and technical authorities to the wider Army. The network should extend into theatre and include nodes across the Army commands as shown at Figure 2 and described below.

Figure 2: The Army Lessons Network

contribute to the ACMF are also part of the network. The LWDC is the coordinating organisation but also provides key nodes of the network, through CAL (and its Liaison Officers), Doctrine Wing, Force Development Group and the Army Experimental Framework.

Other network nodes include Army staff assigned to other lessons stakeholder organisations.

Information Systems

range of security classifications resulting in all lessons being available to anyone with access to the information system. However, in order to ensure maximum utility of lessons, it is vital that observations have a security classification of 'Unclassified' or 'Restricted'. Additionally, this information environment must include the ability, where appropriate, to share lessons with coalition partners.

Conclusion

warfighting environment. The Army lessons process is a whole-of Army approach to the collection, analysis, action and validation of lessons to ensure Army, and the ADO, benefits from its experiences. The goal should be to make system changes before the next soldier has to try to learn a lesson that his predecessor has already learned.

from operations are rapidly incorporated into doctrine, training and capability development. It ensures a systematic approach to determining which lessons from 'The War' should be incorporated into preparations for 'The War' and 'Future War'. W. Edwards Denning once noted that learning is not compulsory, but neither is survival. Perhaps this could serve to validate the significance of the Army Lessons Network for wider Army.

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